

# New 'Blue Shield' for UK Overseas Territories to Defend Oceans

- The Blue Shield Programme provides comprehensive tools to defend oceans against illegal fishing activities.
- Suite of support includes innovative technology and surveillance techniques.
- Bermuda is announced as the first Overseas Territory to join the Blue Shield Programme.

The Blue Shield Programme is a new UK Government initiative aimed at tackling the challenges of illegal fishing and unlawful marine activities around the UK Overseas Territories. It will help UK Overseas Territories strengthen the management and enforcement of their oceans.

Announced at this week's Joint Ministerial Council (JMC), the Blue Shield Programme is the latest project funded by the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, which protects over 4 million square kilometers of ocean around the Overseas Territories.

The Blue Shield Programme will identify and analyse activities that may impact the health and sustainability of Overseas Territories' marine environments. Illegal fishing and overfishing can cause significant damage to marine environments threatening the sustainability of fish populations, ecosystems, and the livelihoods of those who fish legally. Effective monitoring and surveillance can help reduce those risks.

The activities surveyed could include illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, commercial and recreational vessel activity, as well as shipping activity.

Through the establishment of compliance and enforcement frameworks, Blue Shield will assist the territories to ensure their waters are protected and sustainably managed. Where necessary, Blue Shield will also assist them to undertake enforcement action against non-compliance.

Overseas Territories will also be supported through specialist training for on-island staff to build local capacity, as well as providing access to innovative surveillance and enforcement techniques. These include:

- Autonomous drone technology that can monitor vast areas of ocean for human activity and report its findings in real time.
- Passive acoustic units, which once deployed underwater can monitor for the sounds of vessels which have their GPS positioning systems turned off.
- Latest satellite surveillance data can be used to monitor maritime activity across entire Exclusive Economic Zones.

Lord Zac Goldsmith, Minister for the Environment, commented:

The new Blue Shield Programme will help UK Overseas Territories protect their hugely important marine environments against Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing and other damaging activities.

The Programme will provide training and will use emerging enforcement technologies such as drones and satellite surveillance.

I am absolutely delighted that Bermuda is the first Territory to join the Blue Shield, and I look forward to an excellent partnership.

Bermuda today announced that it would be the first Overseas Territory to join Blue Shield. Support provided by the Programme, to combat IUU fishing, and manage vessel activity and marine development projects, will underpin Bermuda's existing protected areas management approach.

Honourable Walter Roban, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda, commented:

I am very excited for Bermuda to be participating in the Blue Shield Programme and I thank the UK Government for their willingness to share vital technology that will help support the surveillance, protection and management of our marine environment.

Bermuda will continue to align itself with the highest standards needed for the protection of our oceans. Following on from our leading participation in the Sargasso Sea Commission, our Blue Shield involvement further strengthens Bermuda's role as custodian of one of the world's foremost marine ecosystems.

Notes to editors:

- For more detailed information about the Blue Shield Programme go to: [Blue\\_Shield\\_A4.pdf](#) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](http://publishing.service.gov.uk))
- Interviews are available on request
- A range of other Overseas Territories are in discussions about joining the Programme
- Attached photograph is a heatmap, produced in the surveillance assistance provided to British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) as part of the Blue Belt Programme, and an example of what is offered to overseas territories under the Blue Shield Programme. Photo Credit Blue Belt Programme/OceanMind About the Blue Belt Programme:
- The Blue Belt Programme is a UK Government initiative to enhance marine protection and sustainable management of activities in the UK Overseas Territories.
- Overseas Territories who protect their waters with the support of this Programme include Ascension Island, the British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, the Pitcairn Islands, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha – covering

over 4 million km<sup>2</sup>, an area 17 times the size of the UK and over one percent of the Earth's entire ocean.

- Overseas Territories within the Blue Belt Programme have access to this important capability, but it is now available via the Blue Shield to all other interested Overseas Territories.
- This flagship Programme has been central to the UK Government's ambition of leading action to tackle the serious global problems of illegal fishing, species extinction and climate change. The Programme has underpinned the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan and supported the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals. More recently, it has supported the UK's commitment to ensure 30% of the world's oceans are protected by 2030.
- The Blue Belt Programme is delivered by the OTs with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

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